



EmployeeUPDATE

Our Mission: To serve the people of North Carolina by enabling individuals, families and communities to be healthy and secure, and to achieve social and economic well-being.

A monthly publication for employees of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Five Receive Homelessness Awards

Five individuals and groups received special recognition for their efforts to end homelessness in North Carolina at this year's annual conference on homelessness.

"On one cold January night this past winter, we did a count of the number of homeless people in North Carolina," said DHHS Homelessness Policy Coordinator Martha Are. "More than 11,000 people were homeless and more than 2,300 of them were children. This year's award recipients are honored for their work to reduce those numbers."

The recipients of the 2005 N.C. Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs Awards for Excellence include two men who know firsthand what it is like to be homeless. Sam McClean and James Douglas Grissom were honored for their individual efforts.

Today McLean manages the Helen Wright Center for Women, which provides emergency shelter, transi-



Award recipients are, left to right, John Bush, executive director, Step UP Ministries; Rev. Rebecca Dixon of Wilmington; award presenter Linda Povlich, chair of ICCHP; Angela Hutchins, director of business development for New Atlantic Contracting Inc. of Winston-Salem; Sam McLean, director of Housing, Urban Ministries of Raleigh; James Douglas Grissom of Winston-Salem.

tional housing and support services for women who are homeless. McLean knows the special problems faced by these women because he was once homeless as well.

Sam was once a resident of the Urban Ministry's Ark Shelter, where he worked to overcome a history of substance abuse. His problems had also led to a prison sentence. Within weeks

of graduation from the Ark Shelter, he became a weekend relief staff person at the shelter. He moved steadily through the Urban Ministry's ranks to his present position.

Since overcoming homelessness, Sam has reunited with his family. Today he is the single parent of two children and enjoys spending happy hours with his grandchildren.

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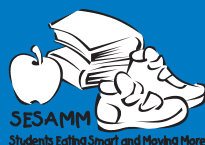
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Urban Ministries Executive Director Anne Burke who nominated McLean for the award said he has proven himself as an effective advocate. "Sam McLean does not flaunt his former homelessness, nor does he hide it," she said. "His legacy to all of us is the way he gets us to see past the skin of each homeless person to the beautiful person beneath."

James Douglas Grissom has spent three decades of his life as a homeless addict and he's been told twice that he has only six months to live because of his HIV infection. In December 2001 he was admitted to a hospital, weighing 109 pounds and unable to talk or eat. After his release from the hospital in January 2002, he made his way to Samaritan Ministries in Winston-Salem and was admitted to Project Cornerstone, a long-term recovery program for homeless addicts. Although Cornerstone men can stay up to 18 months in the program, Grissom spent just eight months before moving into transitional housing.

December 15, 2005 will mark his fourth year of sobriety. Today James works with men who are experiencing the troubles he once experienced. He is resident manager for AIDS Care Services, which provides help for people with HIV/AIDS. He is currently sponsoring seven men to overcome their addictions through Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous and he is a volunteer in numerous community organizations that work with people who are homeless, infected with HIV or have substance abuse problems.

Joanne Viren, Samaritan Ministries Development Director, said Grissom

is using his background to help others move ahead. "We believe in James, and in all he has accomplished in turning his life around and in helping others do the same," she said.

Reverend Rebecca Dixon of Wilmington received the Sandra Wells Peterson award, which is named for a woman who devoted her life to addressing homeless issues before passing away in 2000.

For 16 years, Rev. Dixon has helped Southeastern North Carolina's homeless. Much of her work has focused on women and children who were victims of domestic violence and are living in the Volunteers of America Willow Pond apartments in Wilmington. She began work there in 1994 as program director and was promoted to Director of Transitional Housing Services in 1999. Willow Pond provides housing to families for up to two years, while they work to transition to more permanent homes. While at Willow Pond, families receive mental health, employment and education counseling, which will help them in their future lives.

Despite working many hours with Volunteers of America, Rev. Dixon has been involved a full-range of efforts to fight homelessness. She is one of the founders of the Tri County Homeless Interagency Council, which includes more than 80 agencies working in New Hanover, Brunswick and Pender counties to end homelessness. Because of her efforts, Tri County has been cited as a national and state model for community efforts to address homelessness.

New Atlantic Contracting, Inc. of Winston-Salem received this year's corporate award. Since 2001, New Atlantic has made significant contributions to Samaritan Ministries, which runs a 69-bed homeless shelter and a soup kitchen in downtown Winston-Salem.

The company provided project management and labor for a renovation of the shelter in 2001. In 2005, it provided project management and professional expertise on a renovation of the agency's administrative offices.

The company is a major corporate supporter of Samaritan's fundraising campaigns, and it makes an annual holiday donation to increase awareness of hunger and homelessness in the community.

New Atlantic's commitment extends to personal help as well. Members of Walters' family have worked in the kitchen preparing lunches and a member of the company's executive team serves on the nonprofit's board of directors.

StepUP Ministry of Raleigh received the community impact award. StepUp was founded in 1988 by members of White Memorial Presbyterian congregation. Today more than 160 volunteers and 16 congregations serve Raleigh-area homeless. StepUp provides a full-range of services including meals, temporary housing, job placement, teaching life skills like budgeting and mentoring children.

The backbone of those services is the three-phase, 12-month Life Skills

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Jalil Isa

iSalud y Saludos!

Holiday Traditions

As we approach the Christmas and New Year's holidays, Latinos around North Carolina will once again be celebrating--adding their own unique touch. For starters, goat farmers will likely see a rise in sales. Many Latin Americans incorporate the roasting of a goat as part of their traditional holiday meal. Ditto on the swine. A roasted whole pig is part of the traditional Noche Buena--the name given to the Christmas Eve celebration--for any Cuban household, as well as others. In some parts of Miami, it can be impressive to see just how much pork is consumed on this day alone. It's often cooked in a large box that's designed just for this type of event. But that's just some of the food that will fill many of the dining tables in Hispanic homes.

Other traditions that will be carried out include the singing of Spanish songs that are common to the native lands of many of the new residents. They're called villancicos and are as popular with Hispanics as "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" is among Anglos. In addition to the songs, there are other 'performances,' of sorts...that may be played out at special events. One of these is called a Posada. This basically involves the re-enactment of the scene when Joseph and Mary were looking for lodging in the old tale about Jesus' birth. This is often done to the delight of

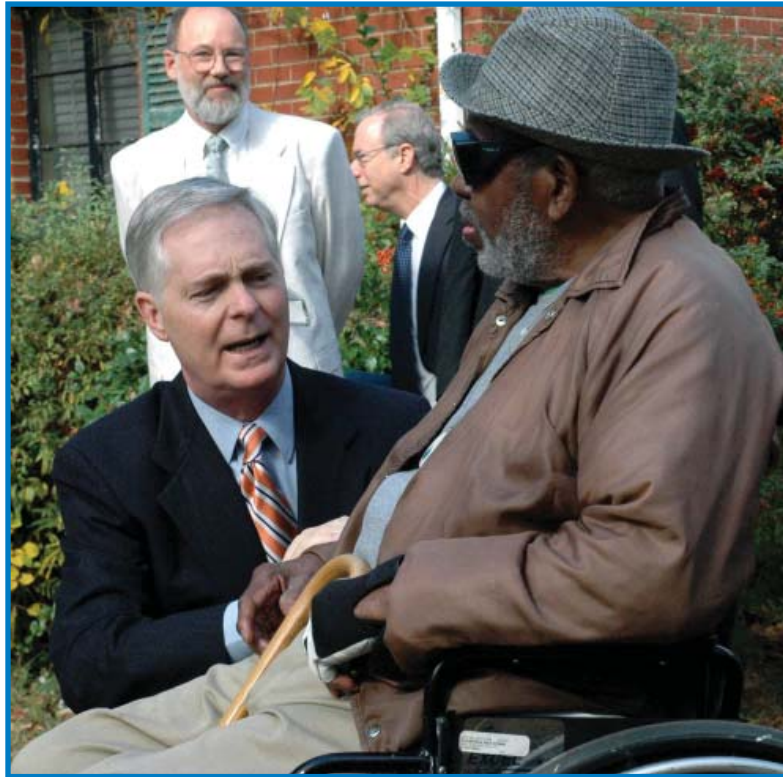
children and adults, alike. Afterwards, a meal featuring an abundance of the typical "tamales" may be had. This will bring people from all corners, anticipating the traditional feast of the cornmeal cooked in plantain leaves or cornhusks.

While Santa Claus will definitely play a role in the Latino Christmas holidays...so will the Three Wise Men or Tres Reyes Magos, as they are called in Spanish. In some countries, there is a separate celebration held on January 6th that prominently features these characters. But the major celebrations and partying undoubtedly take place on Noche Buena. On this date, families will gather around the plentiful food and drinks including a special egg nog punch that many Latinos make, called Crema de Vie or Rompope -- and will enjoy the company of all the relatives they may only get to see during special occasions like this one. The music will be playing in the background, several of the men may likely be playing some rounds of dominoes, and others may even take to the dance floor before the night is over (which will extend well past midnight on Christmas Day).

El Año Nuevo or New Year's will involve similar cuisine and similar partying. But this time, there are some traditions that will play out that some of my non-Hispanic friends have pointed

out as "odd." For starters, there will be a run on grapes. Why, you may ask...well, Latinos will be eating 12 grapes at the stroke of midnight on the 1st of January. I'm not sure exactly how this tradition took hold. But this will be a natural part of any New Year's celebration. Accompanying the grapes -- both before and after -- will be a healthy supply of Sangría. This is a punch made out of red wine and fruits that is often traced back to Spain. Above and beyond these traditions, however, Hispanics will most cherish the time they spend with their families. This is one experience that both the Latino and Anglo culture can share and value together. ■

Governor boosts assistance for weatherization, heating bills



Gov. Easley speaks with L.C. Thompson, 90, of Raleigh, whose home received a new heating system through weatherization funds. Garman Troup, rear, is housing director for Resources for Seniors, the weatherization service provider for Wake County.

Gov. Mike Easley announced a plan Nov. 16 to provide nearly \$10 million in public and private resources to help low-income North Carolinians with the high heating costs expected this winter. The funds will be used to provide needy residents with home weatherization and crisis assistance to help pay utility bills. The combined resources are anticipated to serve about 70,000 North Carolina families.

"I commend our corporate citizens, including Progress Energy, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas, PSNC, North Carolina Power and Electricities that provide power to North Carolina citizens," said Easley. "These additional dollars allow us to make nearly \$10 million available to provide crisis assistance and cut the state weatherization waiting list in half.

"The unusually high fuel prices this year highlight the need for a national energy solution," said Easley. "I have joined with other governors to urge Washington to act, but in the meantime, we are going to do what we can to help our most vulnerable citizens stay warm this winter. Through the weatherization program alone, average consumers will see their energy bill reduced by about a quarter."

Most utility programs offer some type of charitable contribution program where customers and/or their employees can donate money that will go to other customers struggling to pay their bills. Some companies, including Duke and Progress provide matching funds for donations.

Easley said the state will provide a total of \$6.5 million for this effort. This includes \$3.4 million in crisis intervention funds from the Contingency and Emergency Fund. The use of these funds must be approved by the Council of State. The Governor also announced that energy companies will match the state's crisis intervention program by providing \$3.4 million in donations for use by low-income consumers statewide. In addition, the state will redirect \$3.1 million in existing funding to weatherization programs.

Energy costs are expected to rise dramatically for the coming heating season, with natural gas prices rising more than 50 percent and heating oil and propane prices increasing more than 30 percent over last year's prices. According to conservative estimates, these price increases will increase the average home utility bills by \$300 to \$400 over the course of the heating season.

The state will join with private energy companies to provide an additional \$6.8 million to families in crisis. The state crisis intervention program, administered through the Depart-

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North Carolina Leads Country in Emergency Department Visit Surveillance

North Carolina is the first state in the nation to have a fully automated statewide hospital emergency department surveillance system. State Health Director Leah Devlin unveiled the North Carolina Hospital Emergency Surveillance System (NCHCESS) in November. NCHCESS will provide real-time surveillance of hospital emergency department visits across North Carolina.

“Past experience has shown us that health problems often begin as a cluster of events that could be an early sign of a major epidemic or an act of bioterrorism that could go unnoticed until it became completely out of control,” Devlin said. “NCHCESS will allow us to catch problems while they are still small and to take appropriate public health measures to ensure that they remain as small as possible.”

With NCHCESS, statewide hospital emergency department data is electronically submitted to the Division of Public Health. Public health experts will be able to see quickly any unusual clinical information or trends that could point to a disease outbreak or bioterrorism incident and take the appropriate response.

More than 100 hospitals across the state are participating in the highly automated NCHCESS. The new program augments a manual, paper-driven system that can take weeks to analyze trends and investigate hospital records.

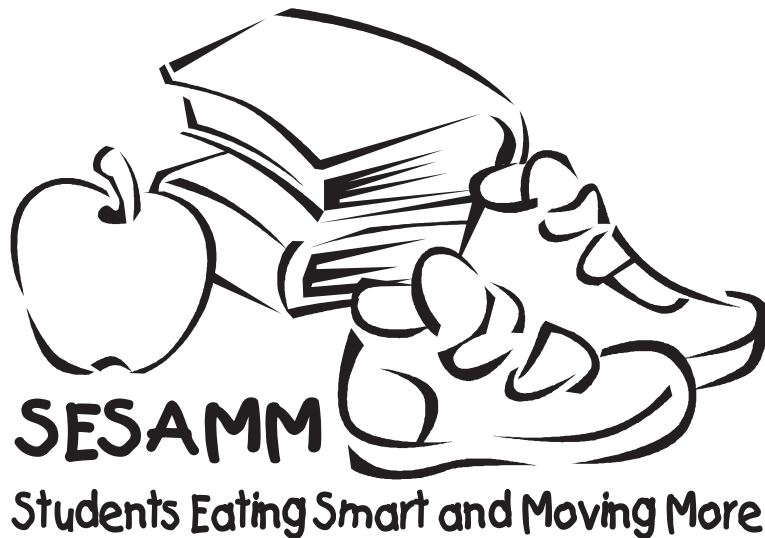


Dr. William Atkinson, Dr. Leah Devlin

“Hospital emergency departments are always on the front line in efforts to protect patients,” said William Pully, president of the North Carolina Hospital Association. “We are very proud to be working with the state in an effort that makes a tremendous stride forward in both public and patient safety. Our hospitals will benefit greatly from this effort. A positive working relationship between the state and hospitals has produced something unique and special for North Carolina citizens.”

The system was developed in a partnership between the N.C. Division of Public Health; the N.C. Hospital Association; the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, Department of Emergency Medicine; and all North Carolina hospitals with emergency departments. It was funded with a federal bioterrorism grant that became available after 9/11. It will detect incidents of bioterrorism like anthrax, but it will also track other public health threats such as SARS or influenza. It will also be used in the wake of natural disasters like hurricanes to track health problems and ensure that they are addressed quickly. ■

Fighting fat: New school-based initiative will help teens and pre-teens develop healthier eating and physical activity habits



Four North Carolina school-based health centers have been awarded Students *Eating Smart and Moving More* (SESAMM) grants as part of the N.C. Division of Public Health's (DPH) obesity prevention efforts. The \$25,000 grants will provide interventions for students ages 10-19 and their families from January 2006 through May 2007 in Buncombe, Durham, New Hanover and Yancey counties.

"We will avoid negative messages and focus totally on fun, healthy behaviors that students will enjoy and want to continue after the program ends," said Michelle Futrell, a DPH registered dietitian who is coordinating the program.

Up to 25 student volunteers at each school will be selected to participate in the 18-week program, which includes nutrition screening, individual counseling, and group sessions conducted by a registered dietitian. Interactive, after-school group sessions will provide education and skill-building in both nutrition and physical activity. Students will prepare and taste healthy foods, develop media literacy, practice decision-making skills, and choose fun physical activities that can become part of a healthy lifestyle.

Each health center will also hold five sessions for parents of SESAMM students and other interested community members to build home, school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity. The adults will learn about eating smart at home; eating smart on the run; moving more every day, everywhere; and reducing time spent watching TV or playing computer games.

"Most students have little or no access to a nutritionist," Futrell said. "SESAMM will provide students with nutritional counseling by a registered dietitian and

peer interaction to encourage behavioral changes. Including families in the program expands kids' opportunities and support for developing better eating and activity habits," Futrell said.

The grants are being offered initially as pilot programs in these four school-based health centers but may later be adapted for schools having strong Coordinated School Health Programs and community support.

"Among North Carolina children, the rates of both overweight and risk of overweight exceed the national average," Futrell said. "In 2004, over 27 percent of children seen in North Carolina public health settings were overweight, and an additional 18 percent were at risk for overweight. Childhood overweight can lead to serious health consequences, particularly as overweight children become overweight adults."

"The best time to start building healthier habits is in childhood. The best places to do that are in the home and at school," she added.

Receiving the SESAMM grants will be Buncombe County Health Department's Health Center at Erwin Middle School; Lincoln Community Health Center at Hillside High School in Durham County; Wilmington Health Access for Teens' Health Center at Lakeside High School in New Hanover County; and the Toe River Health District's Health Center at East Yancey Middle School in Yancey County. ■

Funding Opportunities with DHHS: No Longer a Mystery

The Division of Budget and Analysis is working on a new website that will be useful to grant coordinators and to agencies and nonprofits looking for grant opportunities.

Many divisions and offices field calls from vendors and other customers of DHHS who wish to locate funding opportunities. The process, called a Request for Application (RFA) may be used when the funding source – an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services – is acting as a flow-through for grant funding, and there are no true deliverables. Currently, the notices for these opportunities are issued by the various divisions and offices in the department with little consistency.

Unlike the process for purchasing with Requests For Proposals (RFPs) where potential contractors submit sealed technical proposals and bids, RFA notices are not consolidated centrally for those who wish to do business with the State. Posting these notices centrally on a website will afford our customers one stop shopping.

Divisions and offices with RFAs to post are requested to submit them to Budget and Analysis for posting to the website. Jim Slate, acting director of Budget and Analysis, will send a letter to division directors about these submissions early in December. Contact Andy Watry at 919-733-6396 for more information.

Look for the site to be up and running early in 2006. Eventually this site will ease the process of answering public inquiries about funding opportunities in the department. That can lower the administrative burden for maintaining mailing lists of those who wish to be notified of these opportunities. Most of all, service to the public is improved. ■

Homelessness Awards cont. from page 2

program. During the first two months, volunteers teach participants basic financial literacy skills like how to design a household budget. During the next four months, mentors work individually with participants to understand household management, debt repayment, educational goals, improving quality family time and exploring faith. During the final six months, volunteers work to move participants into permanent housing.

recovery from substance abuse. After 18 months, Jubilee Jobs has placed 200 individuals in jobs and 75 percent have stayed employed for more than six months. ■

StepUp continues to build on its success. The Jubilee Jobs of Raleigh project was launched in 2004. This program helps participants prepare for employment. The clients have special needs, because two-thirds of them have criminal backgrounds and a third are in

Students reach out to aid Katrina Victims

At this time of year many of us reflect on what we have to be thankful for and, in this particular year, Hurricane Katrina's devastation has been a vivid reminder that we have much for which to be thankful.

When the first telecasts were shown portraying the damage to the Gulf coast, students at the North Carolina School for the Deaf (NCSD) in Morganton, like so many others, were shocked. The loss of lives and damage to property was beyond comprehension.

NCSD students immediately expressed a desire to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. They learned that the Louisiana School for the Deaf in Baton Rouge, LA was providing temporary

living quarters, food, and clothing to deaf individuals and their families and that, in so doing, the school had stretched its resources beyond capacity. NCSD's Student Body Government sponsored a car wash and earned \$435.00. Staff and students donated \$240.82 in cash. The NCSD Booster Club and the NCSD Alumni Associated each donated \$100.00. NCSD students also collected clothing and school supplies.

NCSD sent the money raised, \$875.82, to the Louisiana School for the Deaf for use to help provide necessities to Hurricane Katrina victims. In addition, the wife of NCSD staff member Jeff Fitzgerald graciously volunteered to drive a van load of

donated clothes to the Louisiana School for the Deaf. And, finally, NCSD donated boxes of school supplies to the Mississippi School for the Deaf and delivered them by bus when students from NCSD and the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf in Wilson, traveled to Mississippi for a sports tournament. ■

Heat Assistance cont. from page 4

ment of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Division of Social Services, provides a maximum of \$300 in energy assistance to low-income families who can demonstrate a heating or cooling crisis.

Families in financial need may contact their local Division of Social Services office for more information.

Weatherization programs are administered through DHHS. The weatherization program currently provides comprehensive weatherization services to 3,500 low-income families per year. About 70 percent of recipients are elderly. There is currently a waiting list of 2,500 eligible families who have

signed up for the program but have not received services. With the governor's funds announcement, the waiting list will be cut in half. ■

New ATV Safety Law Goes Into Effect

Children will be protected thanks to new all-terrain vehicle regulations that went into effect December 1. The regulations prohibit young children from operating ATVs, older children are allowed to operate only smaller machines under adult supervision, and all operators must wear helmets.

“Since 2000, 36 North Carolina children under the age of 16 died in all-terrain vehicle accidents,” said State Health Director Dr. Leah Devlin. “This law should go a long way toward reducing that tragic toll.”

“It is particularly important that parents are aware of the law this time of year, when they may be considering buying an ATV as a holiday present for their child,” said Tom Vitaglione, co-chair of the N.C. Child Fatality Task Force and a fellow of the Child Advocacy Institute. “While the law is specially designed to save children’s lives, this can only be done with the cooperation and vigilance of parents, who must assure children operate ATVs safely at all times.”

Provisions of the law include:

- Children under 8 cannot operate ATVs.
- Children ages 8-11 may operate only ATVs with an engine displacement less than 70 cubic centimeters.
- Children ages 12-15 may operate only ATVs with engine displacement of 90 cubic centimeters or less.
- Children ages 8-15 may operate an ATV only under the continuous visual supervision of a person 18 years of age or older.
- All operators, including adults, must wear helmets and face protection.
- ATV operators cannot carry passengers, unless the machine is specifically designed for passengers.
- ATVs cannot be operated on public streets, roads or highways, except for purposes of crossing.
- Beginning October 1, 2006, all ATV operators born on or after January 1, 1990 must have a safety certificate showing that he/she has successfully completed an ATV safety



course sponsored or approved by the All-Terrain Safety Institute.

Violators of the law may receive fines up to \$200. If the ATV is used for farm purposes, hunting or trapping, then the law does not apply. ■

Influenza Prevention Awareness Event

The Senior Vaccination Season (SVS) Coalition, in collaboration with the North Carolina Immunization Branch, is held their 35th annual flu season awareness event on Nov.15, to raise older adults' understanding of ways to protect themselves from flu.

For the past five years, former University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) basketball coach Dean Smith has served as the SVS flu season honorary spokesman. ■



Coach Smith speaks on the importance of getting a flu shot.



State Health Director Leah Devlin, Coach Smith and Immunization Branch Head Beth Rowe-West.



Coach Smith signs autographs for those in attendance.

What can you do to protect yourself against the flu?

Practice the following healthy habits to help prevent catching and spreading the flu:

- Wash your hands often,
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as much as possible,
- Stay away from people who are sick,
- If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick,
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and
- Get regular exercise, enough rest and eat healthy, balanced meals.

For more information about the flu shot, or to schedule your appointment to get a flu vaccination, contact your doctor today. You can also visit www.immunizenc.com for more information. ■

